

Forest Baptist Church
 October 4th, 2009
 Series: 10 Things I wish Jesus Never Said
 Title: The Art of Spiritual Self-Loathing

Retreat Run-down:

It's been a while, but tonight we are returning to our series on 10 things I wish Jesus never said... at the heart of each of these sayings, is essentially this... Jesus is telling me to do something... its difficult to do... I may not even want to do it...

When Jesus taught some of these things, I'm sure these and others are exactly the responses he got as well...

Do you remember the time when a lot of disciples deserted Jesus? It was after a hard saying of Jesus... in fact one of the most difficult and confusing sayings of Jesus.

John 6:53-66

Jesus spoke to the disciples about eating His flesh and drinking His blood... what was their response?

John 6:60 Even his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?"

This was a scandalous and shocking thing to say... eat my flesh, drink my blood... the result of which caused many people to leave and not return to follow Jesus anymore. John 6:66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

The danger in the hard sayings of Jesus is this... that we'll get discouraged, or disillusioned and believe the lie that its not worth following this man who says these crazy things... the other side of it is this...

John 6:64 Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him.

Jesus knows our hearts, he wants to sift out the chaff from the wheat and he wants the wheat to be big and healthy and plump...

When we choose to listen to what Jesus tells us to do we grow, we deepen in our relationship with him... and yes it may be difficult, it may be out of our comfort zones... but you don't get stretched without those things...

Illustration: Leg Cramps growing up... used to wake up in the middle of the night screaming in pain... because my legs were growing...

There is pain attached sometimes to our growth as well...and in order for us to grow, we need to obey the tough sayings of Jesus...

Tonight we're looking at the art of spiritual self-loathing...

Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-- yes, even his own life-- he cannot be my disciple.

This is a tough saying...for most of us...some of us have no problem understanding it and that's another issue entirely for another day...but for those of us who come from healthy homes, we know our natural inclination is to love our mom's and dads, to love our spouses and kids, our siblings...but to hate them? That just doesn't make any sense...does it? To even consider hating my wife and kids, almost makes me cry...few things, if anything are more offensive for me to think about...

And yet that's certainly what it appears Jesus is telling me to do. Let's investigate this whole idea of familial hatred. Jesus notes several types of love in this command:

- Love of parents
- Love of siblings
- Love of spouse
- Love of children
- Love of self

It really would be something if Jesus literally expected us to love our enemies and hate our parents...

What's happening here is a figure of speech known as hyperbole...Jesus loved to use it...if you know your English Language you know that hyperbole is what? Exaggeration for Effect...

After hearing this teaching of Jesus, if you didn't come away scratching your head and thinking, what is this guy about, you probably didn't really listen to what was just said...by using shocking statements and bringing together common wisdom with truth that seemed incompatible, Jesus made his listeners think through what he said...that's part of what made him such a great teacher...

Familial love is easy love...I can see it in the eyes of my boys when they come running to me with arms wide open, a huge smile on their face, and jump into my arms, expecting a huge hug from dad...loving our enemy is difficult if not impossible, but to love my mom, well that's just there...unless she makes me eat meat loaf, avocados, or liver-worst...then it was up for debate...

What Jesus is doing is this—he's using this kind of love as a test of our commitment to Christ. How deep is your love for me?

We don't really understand this so much, but those in Islam certainly do...to convert from Islam to Christianity is make a complete break from everything you hold near

and dear...they can no longer frequent the same shops, hang out with the same friends, lose their jobs and its often a signature on your own death warrant, most often from your own family member...it's a regular practice in the middle East, and its now coming to North America...honour killings as they are called...

All of this for following Jesus...yet Jesus envisioned this would happen. He knew that following Him would create strife and division, not just between his disciples and those in the world, but even in families:

Matt.10:34-39

In order to be true disciples, we must love Jesus supremely. To think that Jesus suggested that we should have bitter hatred in our hearts toward father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters is to miss the point. Rather He was emphasizing that love for Christ must be so great that all other loves are hatred *by comparison* (cf. Matt. 10:37). No consideration of family ties must ever be allowed to deflect a disciple from a pathway of full obedience to the Lord.¹

How deep is our love for Christ? Think about it for a minute and we'll continue on...is your love deeper for

¹MacDonald, William ; Farstad, Arthur: *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995, S. Lk 14:26

Jesus than it is for your spouse, your children, your grandchildren, your parents?

What does it Mean to Hate Yourself?

Jesus also instructs us to hate ourselves...if we don't hate our own life, we cannot be Jesus' disciples.

The most difficult part of this first term of discipleship is found in the words "**and his own life also.**" It is not only that we must love our relatives less; we must **hate** our **own** lives **also!**

That's tough stuff...it's probably safe to say that all temptations pale in comparison to the temptation of self-love...we are proud people.

Luther: "whatever you set your heart on and rely on is really your God."

What is that for you? Perhaps its sports, your job, your car, your gaming system, your extra-curricular activities, your online life, your kids, yourself?

The reality is every single one of us struggles in this area. Most of us in the area of self-love...

I want to make something crystal clear for us tonight...self-love is always a sin! Wow, there, I said it...always...no and, ifs, buts, nor, fors, yets about it...always! At the core of self-love is pride!

Our culture is all about self-love isn't it? I mean, isn't the American, and by comparison the Canadian dream about us and only us? We've been sold the lie that you can't love others, until you first love yourself...we need to find ourselves before they can care for the needs of others, etc...its even crept into churches...the whole health and wealth gospel is centered on me...might as well call it me-church.

It seems as though we love ourselves so much that we have no time to really serve God or others. Self-love does not make loving one's neighbour possible. Self-love kills the love of one's neighbour...we are told to put them first, how can we if we are putting ourselves first? Once we put ourselves first, we've lost the ability to accommodate anyone else, even God!

Self love always comes with a dance partner...self-reliance. I can do it all by myself...I don't need any help!

Self reliance tells millions the world over that they don't need god...they can do it all themselves...it is the view that God owes us something, that we can somehow earn God's favour and in and of ourselves please God...that if we work hard enough, we can somehow attain the righteous requirements necessary to live an eternity with God. What a croc!

We need to believe the truth about ourselves...that there is nothing good in me, in you that will get me into the

good graces of God. I am spiritually dead, there is nothing commendable about my sins....

Paul says it this way...that those who don't have God's Spirit living in them are "unfit for doing anything good."

Romans 8:8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

God's relationship with us is always and only motivated by grace. None of us deserves His love...he grants it to us through a relationship with Christ...

Spiritual self-reliance and spiritual self-love have no place in the body of Christ. Either we admit reality and say we are a sinner devoid of anything worthy ourselves, or we proclaim our ability to make ourselves right with God.

Sel-loathing brings freedom from sin and eternal life...self love brings enslavement to sin and eternal death!

Attached to the whole idea of self-love is

1. Self-esteem:

Illustration: Pet Peeves—grading system in schools...can't fail anyone, can't give them a letter grade anymore, because we'll damage their fragile self-esteem...

I was sitting in a class recently where I was informed that disciplining my child now causes low self-esteem...give me strength!

Self-esteem is a god in our world today...healthy self-esteem doesn't mean we always think positively about ourselves. It means we hold right and honest views about ourselves. It is a realization of our spiritual poverty...

2. Humanist Worldview

There is nothing I can't do as long as I put my mind to it...we've been sold this lie since we were in grade school...you can do anything...we can blame the Olympics for this idea...that we celebrate humanity...its subtle, it sounds right, but the whole idea is self-love.

Why? Because it's the world-view of humanism...that we don't need God. If humans would just join hands and come together, put aside our differences and problems, we could do anything.

It's this mindset that began the United Nations...when the nations of the world start working together, putting aside our differences, wars will cease and peace will happen...not so good so far...

The whole idea of believing in yourself, building your self-esteem, be proud of who you are is entirely humanism...and if you dig down deep enough you will be

able to find the little god inside of each of us and find there is nothing we cannot do.

The heart of humanism places people at the center and ignores or excludes God altogether.

Christ's radical idea of self-loathing is counter cultural...it goes against everything we hear around us...it goes against the whole idea of the pursuit of happiness...it involves radical trust in God instead of ourselves. This call of Jesus is to consider ourselves nothing, to forget ourselves, to always place others before us...

Man, that's hard to do...

It's natural for us to love ourselves, its really easy to do so, our culture is pumping us with this message of love self...Jesus says the opposite.

Instead of living self-centered lives, we must live Christ-centered lives. Instead of asking how every action will affect ourselves, we must be careful to assess how it will affect Christ and His glory. Considerations of personal comfort and safety must be subordinated to the great task of glorifying Christ and making Him known. The Savior's words are absolute. He said that if we did not love Him supremely, more than our family and more than our own

lives, we could not be His disciples. There is no half-way measure.² It's all in, or not at all...

The question Jesus leaves us with is this...are we all in?

I'm in, are you? Yeah, it doesn't mean there aren't going to be struggles, of course there are...I fight this all the time...

Illustration: Fight the temptation when I'm singing to think its all about me...are my harmony's just right so that someone will turn around and say, man that sounded so beautiful...that's a fight for me...I constantly battle against that...

Jesus doesn't just ask us to do something crazy hard and then leave us hanging there...

He doesn't command us to go climb mountains, and then leave us without ropes, helmets and harnesses.

We've been left the Holy Spirit...the Helper, our Comforter...that's a huge assist...without His help, we are forever glued to the notion that we are the be all and end all of life's very existences...and it just isn't so...He is the one guiding us into all truth...truth about who God is, but also truth about who we are!

²MacDonald, William ; Farstad, Arthur: *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995, S. Lk 14:26

Let me close with four areas we can avoid the idolatry of self and develop a proper self-loathing.

1. Put God Before Yourself

The very reason we exist, is to bring God glory and serve him. If we don't grasp this, we will never understand, we will never attain the level of spiritual maturity God wants for us. You and I were made to worship...that's it...not ourselves, but God!

We have a propensity of creating God in our image and then claiming to be following Him when all we are following is a false image. We only rise to the level of our image of God. If it's a low image, we can expect our lives to reflect that...

Each time we sin we allow idolatry of self to flourish. We need to daily submit our wills to God's completely surrendering our lives to his.

Ours is not to question why...ours is but to do or die...we are like sheep led to the slaughter...if that looks foolish to those around you, guess what, you got it! Jesus is opposed to the culture and he expects his disciples to conform to His will, not the cultures expectations.

Practice putting God first...spiritual disciplines!

2. Put Others Before Yourself

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Our culture is constantly selling us the line that we should be first. Its something we battle with all through our lives beginning with childhood...the me first attitude...the mine about toys, etc.

It's easy to buy into it, because it feels so good...we live in the ME generation...we believe that no one has the right to tell us what to do, that we have rights, and if they are violated in any way, I'll sue the pants off of you...etc.

These are based on selfish attitudes...practice putting others before yourself...

Hold the door for someone...let someone else go first in line...do someone else's chores...make supper or do the dishes for your spouse...here's a kicker, take the smaller piece and let someone have the bigger piece of pie...

3. View the Church as a place for Giving of Oneself

Church is fast becoming a what's in it for me thing...if we understand the reality of church, we'll understand that it is about how can I use my gifts to serve and build up the church and not about what I can get out of it.

This is a challenging thing to think about...

- Church hopping—a common practice. Going from church to church, trying to pick up girls, or seeing if the worship makes me feel the right way...or if I'm motivated by the speaker, or if people make me feel accepted and loved...do you see the common denominator here...me, me, me!

Church is not just about coming up to the trough and gorging ourselves until we are satisfied, then showing up again until we feel more hunger pains...or never again if someone bumps into us or something goes wrong that we don't like and then we move onto the next ecclesiastical mall...

We cannot allow ourselves to be freelance Christians...we need to commit to the body here, become members of a local church, identify your gifts and start using them...we must not view church as existing only to benefit us...sure it does benefit us and should benefit us...but our view should be this...how can we benefit the church...what do I have that I can offer...and if I'm not offering it, why not?

4. Cultivate a selfless prayer life

It's really easy to focus on yourself during prayer...God I need this, God my family needs that...etc...change the focus from prayers that are dominated by requests for ourselves, and focus on others.

Jesus instructs us that we must sacrifice familial relationships if need be to follow Him. But he also tells us that if we do so, the rewards of such sacrifice are actually an increase in family size.

Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother {29 Some manuscripts mother or wife} or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

By following Jesus we become members of a family that is stronger and longer lasting than temporal family ties. The bond is eternal...don't get me wrong...I pray every night for each of my children and extended family to become part of the family of God so that our bond can be eternal as well...

Jesus identified his true family, his mother and brother as those who do the Father's will (Mark 3:33-35).

Are we doing the will of God in the area of our relationships with those who are most loved by us, our families...are we putting them first, or God first? Are we doing perhaps the most difficult thing in life...putting Jesus first, others next and then ourselves...

Jesus says to put Him first so we can be His disciples.